

1.- Analysis of the destination and visitor profile

Where is your best local place to see the stars? It could be closer than you think... It will be somewhere a little away from direct street lighting, with good sightlines that aren't blocked by buildings or trees. Dark Sky Discovery Sites are a nationwide network of places that provide great views and which are accessible to everyone. They have been nominated by local groups and organizations as their top local spot to see the stars.

Galloway Forest Park

Is the largest in Britain, at 300 sq miles, and is the ideal place to explore in the daytime, with ancient woodland and stunning valleys.

But at night, it is one of the best spots in the UK to stargaze with the naked eye, with unrivalled conditions due to the wild scenery, limited number of buildings within its

boundaries and lack of light pollution. Thousands of stars and even the Milky Way are all visible without the use of a telescope.

Forestry Commission England woods and forests can be fantastic places for stargazing – allowing you to see the night sky like never before.

The dark skies above our woods and forests are not only great for stargazers; many woodland species such as birds, bats, moths and insects also benefit greatly from reduced light pollution.

You can experience all of this by taking part in special events to help you search the skies or by staying overnight with Forest Holidays or Camping in the Forest.

Galloway Forest Park

Galloway Forest Park was the first national park in the UK to be awarded Dark Sky Park status from the International Dark Sky Association (IDA) in November 2009. The awards are aimed at reducing light pollution, protecting the dark skies and the natural nocturnal habitats in which wildlife thrives.

It is one of only three dark sky parks in Europe and gives year round opportunities to stargaze. Identified sites for the best views across the park include Clatteringshaws Visitor Centre, Glentroot Visitor Centre, Bruce's Stone, Caldons woodlands and Kirroughtree Visitor Centre.

On the edge of Galloway Forest Park is the Scottish Dark Sky Observatory. Facilities include two impressive telescopes, and a roll-off-roof observatory which offers a unique 'out in the open' experience

The Scottish Dark Sky Observatory occupies a fantastic hilltop site on the edge of the Galloway Forest Park. It is within the magical surroundings of Craigenkillan, rated by Historic Scotland as one of the top four Designed Landscapes in the country, on a par with Culzean and Drumlanrig and ahead of even Balmoral.

This new public observatory lies within the Galloway Forest Dark Sky Park near Dalmellington, under some of the darkest skies in the UK. Galloway Forest Dark park is the only Dark Sky Park in the UK and the only IDA (International Dark-Sky Association) gold tier park to have a public use observatory.

This new observatory includes:

- A fully robotic 20" Corrected Dall Kirkham telescope in a 5 metre dome, which can be operated from a warm control room.
- A roll-off-roof observatory with a 14" Schmidt Cassegrain Telescope for a more hands-on, out in the open observing experience.

Exmoor and around

Exmoor was granted International Dark-Sky Reserve status by the International Dark-Sky Association in 2011. Light pollution is managed to make the area more appealing to amateur astronomers. The rugged interior and dramatic coast of the area inspired Coleridge and Wordsworth, while the villages of Lynmouth and Lynton, linked by a funicular railway, vie with nearby Ilfracombe for daytime attention.

A week at one of the Leys Cottages (08456 805 431; www.leyscottages.co.uk; sleeps six; from £350 per week) sits high on Exmoor, while the nearby Sportsman's Inn (01643 831109; www.sportsmansinn.co.uk) at Sandyway hosts regular stargazing events and has double rooms from £30 per person.

Another fine stargazing location is the neighbouring Blackdown Hills, where astronomer Simon Ould runs stargazing events (for further information, call 01823 680681 or visit www.blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk). Or you can contact him directly. He has his own portable planetarium and company called Space Odyssey (spaceodyssey.co.uk), which is based at Hemyock

Ten miles off the Exmoor coast, the stargazing idyll of Lundy Island has quirky Landmark Trust accommodation that includes a fisherman's hut, a Georgian house and the atmospheric, gaslit Tibbets cottage (01628 825925; www.landmarktrust.org.uk) right in the middle of the island.

Perthshire

Galloway's forests can boast about their Dark Sky Park status, but Perthshire probably gets the nod as Scotland's finest arboreal landscape. At the remotest end of Loch Tay, Ardeonaig Hotel & Restaurant (01567 820400; www.ardeonaighotel.co.uk) offers varied resting places – the hotel itself, African-style rondavels in the grounds or spectacular isolation at a luxurious bothy 30 minutes into the hills.

Around Loch Rannoch, stargazing locations include the Tay Forest Park and Rannoch Moor. By day, explore Dunkeld and Pitlochry, Blair Athol palace, or catch a train at Rannoch Station for the spectacular journey to Fort William.

Powys has some of the lowest light pollution in Britain, and Lake Vyrnwy Hotel & Spa (01691 870692; www.lakevyrnwy.com; double b & b from £144) is a charming Victorian hideaway above a reservoir where *The Dam Busters* was filmed. Airborne

action now comes courtesy of the surrounding RSPB bird reserve, while non-twitchers can canoe, abseil or clay-pigeon shoot.

Queen Victoria, meanwhile, may well have gazed upward from Ynyshir Hall (01654 781209; www.ynyshirhall.co.uk; double b & b £205, rising steeply from April) – her former Welsh hideaway perched above the Dyfi Estuary.

Romney Marsh

Night once provided cover for smugglers known as Owlars, but today Romney Marsh offers celestial bounty, arching over a landscape adorned with the spires of ancient churches. After exploring the marsh villages, the stunning shingle expanse of Dungeness or the bustling

Saxon town of Hythe, stay at Romney Bay House (01797 364747; www.romneybayhousehotel.co.uk; double b & b from £95), built for Twenties actress Hedda Hopper.

Kielder

Kielder Forest is officially the darkest place in England – 250 square miles of wooded beauty where Northumberland brushes against Scotland. It has its own fabulous, modern, wood-clad observatory on the slopes of Black Fell above Kielder Water (see www.kielderobservatory.org for details of opening on any particular day).

The 17th-century Pheasant Inn (01434 240382; www.thepheasantinn.com; double b & b from £90) is a few minutes' drive away in Stannersburn, while Hexham boasts a breathtaking abbey and Roman history, as well as plenty of accommodation.

North York Moors

As well as stunning night skies, the North York Moors boast historic market towns such as Helmsley and Pickering, plus appealing coastal spots, including Scarborough and Whitby.

The Scarborough and Ryedale Astronomical Society's favourite rendezvous is Dalby Forest, close to Flamborough Rigg Cottage b & b (01751 475263; www.flamboroughriggcottage.co.uk; double b & b from £85) and The Hayloft self-catering cottage (thehayloftatflamboroughrigg.co.uk); Hayloft from £275 for three nights, sleeps four).

In Helmsley, stay at the award-winning Feversham Hotel and Spa (01439 770766; www.fevershamarmshotel.com; double b & b from £110) and wander the town lanes or walk to the ruins of Rievaulx Abbey.

Sussex Down

The South Downs Planetarium is a feature of the gentle hills around East Dean and Upwaltham. The area has superb alternative distractions, including the Cass Sculpture Foundation and West Dean gardens.

Stay at Deer Cottage (020 7401 1086; www.cvvillas.com; sleeps four), outside East Dean (home to the excellent Star & Garter gastropub (thestarandgarter.co.uk); or Ruben's Barn (01243 818187; www.rubensbarn.co.uk; double b & b from £180) near Upwaltham. West Stoke House (01243 575226; www.weststokehouse.co.uk) in West Dean offers a Georgian house with a highly regarded restaurant.

Lake District

The Lakes spoil visitors with dramatic viewpoints. Grizedale Forest Park offers superb stargazing by night and the pleasures of Coniston Water, Windermere and the Grizedale Sculpture Park by day. Stay at The Old Rectory (01539 441353; www.theoldrectoryhotel.com; double b & b from £78) near Coniston village.

In the wilder northern section of the national park around Derwentwater, Keswick is a good base from which to visit Friar's Crag, a view 19th-century art critic John Ruskin described as one of the three most beautiful in Europe. Choose from the village b & bs or hunker down in a valley at Low Nest Farm (01768 772378; www.dogfriendlylakedistrict.co.uk; b & b from £32.50 per person per night).

North Norfolk

Norfolk is described as "a great place to observe" and "star parties" are held at the Kelling Heath campsite (01263 588181; www.kellingheath.co.uk; lodge from £343 for four nights, sleeps six). Cley Beach is also recommended for its salty ambience as well as stellar vistas.

If you want to go stargazing on the beach, Cley Windmill (01263 740209; www.cleywindmill.com; double b & b from £110) is a gorgeous historic conversion close by.

Cornwall/Isles of Scilly

The powerful telescope at the Roseland Observatory (01726 813602; roselandobservatory.com) is handily set in the grounds of Court Farm Camping and Caravanning (01726 823684; www.courtfarmcornwall.co.uk; two-berth tents from £11 per night, cottages from £353 a week). Newquay, Truro, Fowey and Mevagissey are all nearby, as are the Lost Gardens of Heligan and Bodmin Moor, the latter another good stargazing possibility. The adjacent Lizard Peninsula also has great dark skies – stay at The Bay Hotel (01326 280464; www.thebayhotel.co.uk, half board £75) in Coverack.

For the darkest skies, though, take the helicopter from Penzance to the Isles of Scilly for a combination of ravishing seascapes and numerous clear nights. St Mary's has the perfect astronomers' hotel: the 16th-century Star Castle (01720 422317; www.star-castle.co.uk; half board from £99 per person), built, as the name suggests, in the shape of a star.

Or head for the wilder Bryher, where cottages include Glenhope High (01720 423136; www.visitbryher.co.uk; from £550 per week, sleeps four), or check into the island's Hell Bay Hotel (01720 422947; www.hellbay.co.uk; from £135 per person per night, full board), which has artwork by Barbara Hepworth and Patrick Heron, along with a stunning location.

Or head for the wilder Bryher, where cottages include Glenhope High (01720 423136; www.visitbryher.co.uk; from £200 per week or £35 per night, sleeps four), or check into the island's Hell Bay Hotel (01720 422947; www.hellbay.co.uk), which has artwork by Barbara Hepworth and Patrick Heron, along with a stunning location.

Jodrell Bank Observatory

The Stargazing Live team broadcast their programmes previously this year from Jodrell Bank Observatory in Manchester. Its visitor centre is open from 10am to 5pm daily (£7/5 adult/child). Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre is fully accessible www.jodrellbank.net; 01477 571 766

Isle of Man

The island apparently has the largest concentration of Dark Sky sites in Britain. Dark Sky Discovery Network announced in 2014 that the island has a total of 26 designated "Dark Sky Discovery Sites".

The **Regency Hotel, Douglas** (01624 680680; www.regency.im) is hosting stargazing weekends this year.

Throughout 2014 the Isle of Man Astronomical Society (www.iomastronomy.org) will be hosting a number of stargazing suppers at the top of the Islands highest mountain, Snaefell.

National Trust properties

The National Trust has also published a list of its own properties with Dark Sky Discovery Status, and how to visit them. They range from Bedruthan Steps in Cornwall to Broad Haven car park in Pembrokeshire

A multi-purpose lecture room served by a toilet and kitchen and an "outdoor classroom" in the form of an elevated observing deck from which to enjoy the inspirational experience of naked-eye observation.

Facilities are also available for amateur astronomers to be able to set up their own equipment and have access to the WC and kitchen amenities

The observatory is situated near the town of Dalmellington and is close to Loch Doon. While in the area, you might like to visit the Doon Valley Museum in Dalmellington. A variety of accommodation is available in the local area.

Camping locations are available around the nearby Loch Doon, where you can stop at The Roundhouse for food and refreshment. A new hardstanding location has also recently opened on Loch Doon, suitable for caravans and camper vans.

Main communication channels are websites, social media- Facebook, Twitter,...

On the web site <http://www.scottishdarkskyobservatory.co.uk> there is a major bookings calendar

You'll see a mixture of events listed – some public, some private. Our "Evening Sessions" are available for anyone who want to visit the observatory – you'll enjoy an introductory presentation, a hosted tour of the Observatory, together with use of the telescopes and a view of the night sky. (weather permitting).

Our events are run by our resident astronomer and science educator David Warrington, as well as a group of local volunteers.

We also hold special events, based around particular astronomical events or featuring a talk by a visiting guest speaker.

If you see an event here showing 'Private Hire', it means that the observatory is already booked on that date for a scheduled visit from a group and so unavailable for hire.

3.- ANALYSIS OF THE TOURIST DEMAND

There is no public available information about average visitors per year that perform astrotourism. In general people from all ages are interested. Teenagers and student are more excited to discover the sky in the night.